

DATE: June 05, 2011

TO: Eric marts, Deputy Director, Service Bureau 2
Dr. Jackie Contreras, Chief Deputy Director DCFS
County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: "CHILDREN WAITING FOR PLACEMENT IN ERCP CHILDREN'S ROOM"

On or about May 29, 2011, I submitted a lengthy document citing numerous concerns associated with children at the Emergency Response Command Post (ERCP). Two days later, I received the attached document, "Children Waiting at ERCP for Placement, dated May 31, 2011, from Charlene Robinson, Assistant regional administrator at ERCP.

Ms. Robinson has been my direct supervisor for just over four years. I believe that we have an outstanding working relationship characterized by mutual respect, trust, and professionalism. The threat of disciplinary action which could lead to discharge is at odds with the working relationship which I have with Ms. Robinson. When she handed me the document, somewhat apologetically she said, "I don't want to be insubordinate..." By inference, and context, it appears that Ms. Robinson is being directed to take such action against her will.

The irony of this situation is that the graveyard shift, to which Ms. Robinson is currently assigned as ARA, and has been assigned for the past four years, was created for the sole purpose of managing the "Overstays" at ERCP. This shift begins at 11:00 P.M and ends at 9:30 A.M. Further adding to the irony is the fact that Ms. Robinson serves in this important slot for only two days out of the week. Even with this assignment for two days in each week, "Overstays" continue to skyrocket.

Additionally, there are two additional managers assigned during the peak hours that overstays come to ERCP. One manager faithfully attends to the charge, the other manager allegedly depends on technology, the blackberry, to manage, support, train,

and deal with the overstay. It would therefore appear that the problem is multifaceted and begs the question: "Is it management, resources, or a combination of both"?

I am objecting and responding to this document, "Children Waiting for Placement in ERCP Children's Room" based on its (1) Unreasonableness (2) Content and (3) Threats of disciplinary action (for failure to engage in abusive behavior towards children.)

UNREASONABLENESS

Maybe Ms. Robinson and the person directing her to deliver the document mentioned above are not aware, but it takes time to sort out who the children are that are brought to ERCP. One of the major tasks on mornings is trying to identify the children. SCSWs on the swing shift as well as SCSWs on the graveyard shift have complained often about the children that are dropped off at ERCP without appropriate information accompanying them from the regional staff. This is especially true of infants and toddlers, who look alike and are of similar ages. Months ago, SCSW Jeff Cekovich requested identification markers for small children and infants. We still don't have such identification markers.

As recently as Thursday, June 2, 2011, in collaborating with the SCSW from graveyard, it took a significant amount of time to identify the 13 children who were at ERCP and determine which children were new and which ones had open cases in regional offices. It takes additional time when some children are fast asleep and others who are sleep deprived, have fallen asleep only one or two hours earlier.

AS duty SCSW, here are some of my tasks within the first 30 minutes of my arrival at DCFS:

1. Review immediate referrals to be assigned;
2. Prioritize those referrals;
3. Assess the availability of personnel;
4. Collaborate with the SCSW from graveyard;
5. Assess the number of children who slept at ERCP the previous night;
6. Focus on updates that must be written to the Executive Team

7. Determine the different levels of need among the children who are at ERCP, (name, age, special needs, newly detained or open case/referral, how long was the child resting);
8. See that all children who have cases opened in regional offices are awakened groomed, and out of ERCP no later than 7:30 A.M.

The contention is that children (**even infants & toddler**) could be fed en route to the regional office. Given the number of infants and toddlers who spend the night at ERCP, is it practical to feed them at a McDonald drive through en route to their respective regional offices? Would the average citizen consider this appropriate and/or humane?

CONTENT

The document “Children Waiting for Placement in ERCP Children’s Room” cites the following: “ On May 23, and May 25, 2011, ERCP administrative staff had to become personally involved in coordinating the transport of children back to their regional offices. In at least one situation, this involved an ERCP administrator along with a group supervisor II staff personally escorting a minor and her child to their assigned regional office. “

May 23, 2011: It is important to note that ERCP logs show 17 children waiting for placement at ERCP on May 23, 2011. The record shows three children departing from ERCP at 9:10 A.M. Of the three, who departed ERCP at 9:10 A.M., one was a child named Isaiah “B”. Isaiah is an older teen who had spent consecutive nights at ERCP proceeding Monday, May 23, 2011. According to my recollection, Isaiah may have also spent time at Exodus around Monday, May 23, 2011. Isaiah is the kind of youngster who would leave on mornings and promise to return at nighttime. Getting Isaiah to the regional office at 7:30 would not facilitate placement. I spoke directly with Isaiah’s CSW. His CSW was fully aware of the situation.

The other two children were female teenagers. According to my recollection, the children were ages 13 years and 14. They were picked up on the streets soliciting for prostitution. These two young teens were admitted to ERCP at 5:45 A.M. on Monday, May 23, 2011, and departed ERCP at 9:10 AM. They were at ERCP fewer than four hours.

May 25, 2011: On Wednesday, May 25, 2011, there were 20 children waiting for placement in the ERCP children’s room. The youngest child was two months old. Of

the 20 children, the last two children, a 14-year old minor mother, Dilia, and her 7-month old child, Erik, left the ERCP children's room at 9:30 A.M.

I know this situation very well as to what occurred, process, and outcome. The involvement of ERCP administrative staff, Evelyn Batiste-Bryant was unnecessary and did not serve the interest of the 14-year old mother and 7-month old child well.

At the time Ms Batise-Bryant came on the scene, ERCP team of highly skilled Group Supervisors had already contacted the caseworker at Metro North and had a plan in place that would have attended to the needs of mother and child, including grooming and feeding for both mother and child. A Group Supervisor had made two trips to Metro North, at 7:30 A.M. and 8:00 A.M., during which time both mother and child were still asleep.

A solid plan of coordination was in place with the staff at Metro North Office. The plan that was in place met the standards for excellent child care, and DCFS policies of best practice

The ERCP administrative staff intervened, and using her administrative authority, stated that the plan that was in place "was unacceptable." She blatantly ignored the needs of the mother and the child. She focused on getting them from off ERCP floor took them to the Metro North floor and left mother and child there un-washed and unfed. The mother had not eaten since 8:00 P.M. the previous night when she was given a snack pack, some water, and cookies.

If the ERCP administrative staff did not get involve with this mother and child, ERCP Group Supervisors would have ensured that the mother and baby were groomed, and fed before departing ERCP for Metro North. Such would have been consistent with the standard of care children expect to receive when under the supervision of DCFS. Such is consistent also with the standard of care DCFS expects of those who care for children who are in protective custody.

PERTINENT QUESTIONS

Did the member of ERCP administrative staff engage the teenage mother to learn of any special problems or needs? Did the member of ERCP administrative staff asked the child when was the last time she ate and whether or not she was hungry? Did the member of ERCP administrative staff review the record to see that the minor mother and her child were admitted to ERCP about thirteen hours earlier? Did the member of ERCP administrative team make any inquiries as to the health of the child? Was a

medical assessment indicated? Those are normal routine tasks performed by ERCP Group Supervisors and SCSW, if given the time to perform them when children get up from sleeping. On occasions we have had to take young children to the hospital because they had spent the night at ERCP and they were observed to be sick when the daytime staff began their shift.

PROMPT DEPARTURE

As has been discussed in a previous document, some delays to transporting children after placements have been obtained are attributed not having a central place for van keys so the keys could be accessible to those who drive the vans to take children to placement. The key to the van, designated to ARA Charlene Robinson is least accessible because the key is usually locked up in Charlene's office and Charlene does not want any other person but her secretary to go in her office. The secretary reports to work at 8:00 A.M. ERCP staff has complained to the Division Chief of this problem on many occasions. The problem is still not resolved.

In the document "Children Waiting for Placement in ERCP Children's Room" ERCP Assistant Regional Administrator said "It is important that these children arrive at their respective offices in a timely manner to ensure that the regional office has an entire day to search for a placement, hold Team Decision-Making meetings and conduct other planning activities." What the ARA failed to mention is that many of the children on open cases in regional offices are brought to ERCP by regional staff. The children spend numerous hours in regional offices during the day and then are brought back to ERCP at night to sleep. There are reasons to conclude that the regional staff, at every level, is aware that the children are at the ERCP office. One value of notifying the DCFS Executive Team and the administrators in the regional offices that there are children at ERCP waiting for placement is to solicit involvement in searches for placements. Such notification was made at the four-hour time frame before Jennifer Lopez's arrival. She has doubled the notification time from a four hour time frame to an 8-hour notification time, significantly delaying the notification process.

FRUSTRATION OF STAFF

On Wednesday morning as I arrived was approached by a veteran employee who said " I am frustrated. I am tired of seeing children mistreated in here. Children are in the children's room all packed up together; they are sleeping on plastic, beds without sheets; there is no space between the beds and the couches where the children are

sleeping. If an emergency develops there is no way you can get to the children. I see this too often and it has gotten to me. You can use my name. This is not right....”

On Thursday morning, June 2, 2011, upon my arrival, there were at least 12 children at ERCP who had spent the night. It took a long time for the graveyard SCSW and I to appropriately identify the children and determine the ones who were newly detained from the ones that were dropped off by regional staff the previous night. The group included children with various kinds of psychotropic medication, a transgender child, toddlers, and two children whose sibling were fatally abused. This is the type of situation, not infrequent by any standard, that must be cleared out of the children’s room in approximately 15 to 20 minutes time or face “Disciplinary action ranging from warning to discharge.

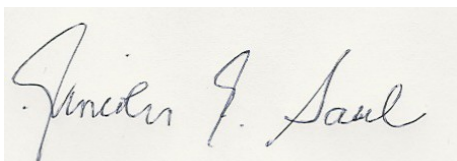
RECOMMENDATION

As a mandated reporter, I suspect this behavior is a mistreatment of children, and borders on child abuse. I am fulfilling my mandate by asking for an investigation of the conditions under which children are kept at ERCP children’s room. I further ask for an investigation of the mandate to wake up children, even infants and toddlers, and get them out of the ERCP children’s room no later than 7:30 A.M. and away from the building without being washed or fed.

I further recommend that the Board of Supervisors order DCFS to report to the BOS on all the children who wait at ERCP, or in DCFS Offices, for placement for any duration. Perhaps only then would the magnitude of the problem of placement resources be fully understood.

Further, I recommend that DCFS Executive Team and/or the BOS revoke the arbitrary time line for waking up children who spend the night, or any part of the night, at ERCP, and sending them away from ERCP un-groomed and unfed.

Thanks!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lincoln L. Saul", written in dark ink on a light-colored rectangular background.

Lincoln L. Saul, MS, MSW, LCSW

ATTACHMENTS:

1. "CHILDREN WAITING FOR REPLACEMENT IN ERCP CHILDREN'S ROOM"
2. DOCUMENT SUBMITTED MAY 29, 2011

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMAND POST

May 31, 2011

To: Lincoln Saul, SCSW
Emergency Response Command Post

From:  Charlene Robinson, ARA
Emergency Response Command Post

CHILDREN WAITING FOR PLACEMENT IN ERCP CHILDREN'S ROOM

It has come to my attention on at least three recent occasions there have been children in the Children's room beyond 7:30am when they have had placements identified and completed placement papers or have had an open regional case in which case should have been transported to their regional office.

On May 23, and May 25, 2011, ERCP administrative staff had to become personally involved in coordinating, the transport of children back to their regional offices. In at least one situation, this involved an ERCP administrator along with a Group Supervisor II staff personally escorting a minor mother and her child to their assigned regional office.

You have been instructed many times before to ensure that all children who are in the children's room during your shift and have an open case in a regional office, are to be up dressed and on their way to their regional office no later than 7:30am. Additionally, you have been instructed that all children are to be transported to placement as soon as a placement has been identified and the placement papers have been completed. As has been mentioned previously, breakfast for these children and be obtained en route to their regional office.

It is important that these children arrive at their respective offices in a timely manner to ensure that the regional office has an entire day to search for a placement, hold Team Decision-Making meetings and conduct other planning activities.

I expect this directive will be sufficient notice for you to make the changes on this issue. I or any ERCP manager is available to provide any assistance in helping you comply with this directive. However, further incidents may result in disciplinary action ranging from warning to discharge.

c: Jennifer Lopez
Drop file